

An agreement to protect the area known as the “Cores and Links” has resulted in an important and historic outcome for the environment and industry. Over 23,000 hectares of native vegetation will be permanently protected in the Strzelecki Ranges, most is protected immediately. This brochure provides details and a map of the area.

What are the Cores and Links?



Even-age Mountain Ash plantation.

The Cores and Links comprise approximately 8,000 hectares of both *Eucalyptus regnans* (Mountain Ash) plantation and native forest in the eastern Strzelecki Ranges located in Gippsland.

The area includes four areas of key native vegetation and plantation (the Cores) joined by corridors of land (the Links), which are also a mixture of plantation and native vegetation. Taken together, the Cores and Links area provides a contiguous vegetated land area stretching from Tarra-Bulga National Park in the east to Gunyah-Gunyah Rainforest Reserve in the west.

History

The Strzelecki Ranges were known as the “Heartbreak Hills” 50 years ago. Excessive clearing for agriculture in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s was the beginning of a period characterised by small family farming enterprises. Due to the difficult terrain, isolation, climate, weeds and the invasion of rabbits,

‘...these plantations, together with the adjacent native vegetation, provide biodiversity to the region’

the land was largely abandoned by the middle of the 20th century.

In the early 1930’s a major replanting program was undertaken by the Victorian Government and APM Forest (now Australian Paper) in the eastern Strzelecki Ranges. However, the main replanting program didn’t commence until the 1950’s and continued through to the 1980’s. By 1986 approximately 400 properties had been purchased by the Victorian Government totaling 28,000 hectares. This is one of the earliest examples of the use of commercial forestry to re-vegetate landscapes.

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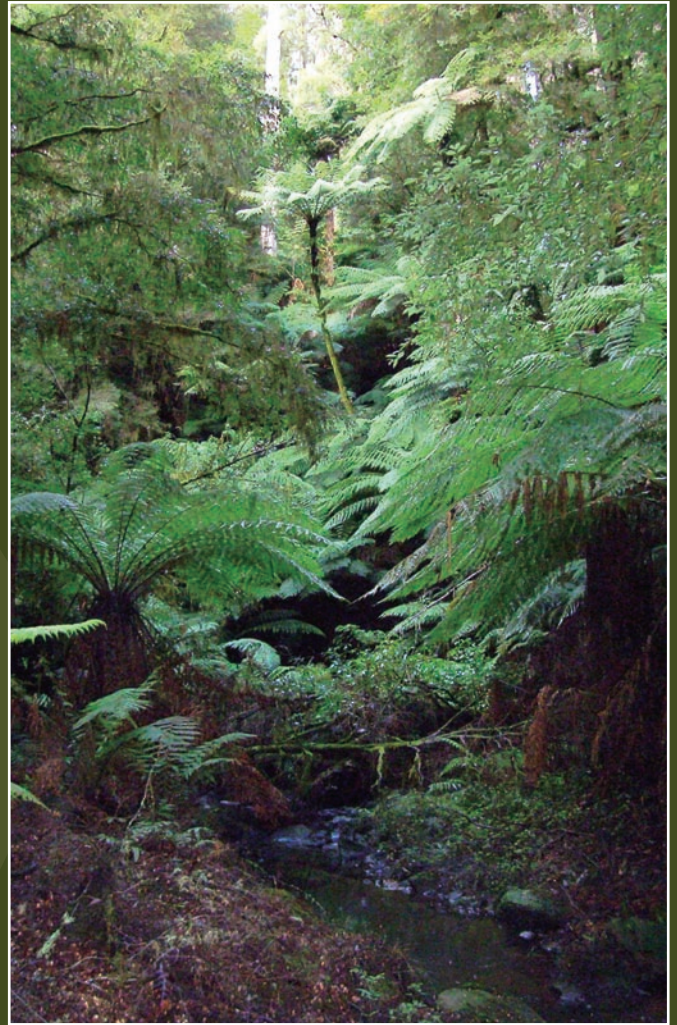
An extensive library of old aerial photographs captures the transformation of the barren slopes to a commercial forest crop. These photographs define the plantation boundaries and often depict the road network as well as mountain communities of the past.

In 1993 the Victorian Government established the Victorian Plantation Corporation (VPC) and vested a large tract of publicly owned plantation, together with adjacent native vegetation, into the VPC's control. These assets were subsequently sold to Hancock Victorian Plantations in 1998 (known as HVP Plantations today).

Within the Cores and Links area is the College Creek catchment which was planted by Australian Paper (AP) specifically for timber production. It was sold by AP to HVP Plantations in 2001 and was not part of the 1998 VPC transaction.

The plantations in the Strzelecki Ranges provide fibre for many industries in the local Gippsland region, including Australian Paper's Maryvale mill which provides over 1,000 jobs in the Latrobe Valley. The Maryvale mill is Australia's largest paper making complex and is an industry leader in environmentally sustainable manufacturing.

Equally, these plantations, together with the adjacent native vegetation, provide biodiversity to the region. They include small patches of rainforest and large areas of native vegetation that provide habitat for native flora and fauna, such as the koala.



Rainforest to be protected.



Eucalypt plantation.

'HVP has a long-term contractual obligation to supply eucalypt fibre to Australian Paper's Maryvale mill in the Latrobe Valley'

For the past decade, HVP Plantations has been committed to finding a solution which balances these competing needs - fibre for the Maryvale mill and the conservation value of the Strzelecki Ranges. HVP Plantations has the legal right to harvest the area as well as a long term obligation to supply the Maryvale Mill. However, the company has voluntarily worked for many years with conservation groups, and more recently the Victorian Government, to find a solution to balance these needs.

The Cores & Links agreement, signed by the Victorian Government and HVP Plantations, is the outcome of many years of work by company staff, consultants, local government, community groups and the State Government and offers both long-term protection of the Cores and Links as well as meeting the needs of Australian Paper.

What has been Agreed?

8,000 ha (Cores and Links) returned to public ownership
A further 15,000 ha plus of native forest in the Strzelecki Range permanently protected
Within the Cores and Links, HVP retains the rights to a once-off harvest of 1,500 ha of plantations over 20 years
Regeneration of indigenous eucalypts following the harvest of 1,500 ha of plantations within the Cores and Links
Protection of the rainforest
Cost to Government \$5.5 million
HVP retains the rights to future carbon and bio diversity credits generated by the protection of native forest

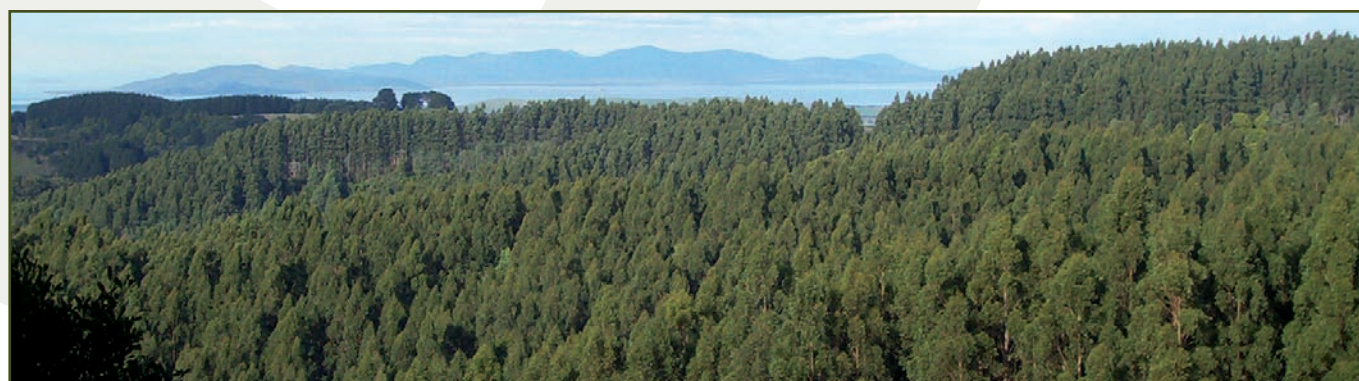
This legal agreement between the Victorian Government and HVP Plantations delivers much greater protection for native forest than the non-binding Heads of Agreement signed by stakeholders in October 2006.

Below are the main points of comparison between the Heads of Agreement signed in October 2006 and the final Agreement, together with a comparison of the situation prior to any agreement being negotiated.

	Prior to the agreement	October 2006	Final Agreement
Protected native forest in the Strzelecki Ranges outside the Cores and Links area	Nil	Nil	Over 15,000 ha
Total native vegetation area immediately protected	Nil	5,600 ha (C&L only)	Over 20,600 ha (Within & Outside C&L)
Area to be harvested	No restriction	Plantation inside C&L plus native forest outside C&L	Increased plantation inside C&L, no native forest
Total native vegetation and plantation area protected over 20 years	Nil	8,000 ha (C&L only)	23,000 ha (15,000 ha outside C&L, 8,000 Inside C&L)
Pulpwood to be harvested from native forest	Nil	460,000 tonnes	Nil
Cost to Government	Nil	\$7.0 million	\$5.5 million

What this means in practical terms

- Immediate protection of an additional 15,000 ha of native forest in the Strzelecki Ranges (outside the Cores and Links area);
- A much greater protection of forests in the region; and
- Fibre supply from HVP maintained to Australian Paper through the harvest of plantations, not native forest.



The new agreement delivers better outcomes for all stakeholders

and in addition...

Future management of the reserve?

The Victorian Government is committed to the Trust for Nature (TFN) having a role in the areas that return to public ownership after the one-off harvest by HVP.

Trust for Nature ready to respond

The Trust for Nature responded strongly to the Minister's statement, welcoming the agreement.

Trust for Nature executive director Mike Gooley said: 'This exciting development heralds a new mature working relationship between government, business and not-for-profit organisations'.

'We congratulate the Government on exceeding the 2006 election commitment to protect the Cores and Links area and surrounds.

'This announcement ensures that, with Trust for Nature's help, the native forests in the Strzelecki Ranges will be protected forever,' Mr Gooley said.



Kangaroo Fern.



Slender Tree-fern.

Gippsland's economy

A study¹ published in 2005 demonstrated the importance of forestry to the Gippsland economy. The industry had a Gross Value of Output of \$1.2 billion per annum and Net Value Output of \$976 million pa.

Payments made directly to local residents and businesses were \$534 million pa including wages of \$161 million, payments to local suppliers of \$361 million and \$12 million to local government. The Australian Paper mill at Maryvale accounts for 72% of the total regional value of output.

Since this study was completed, further investment in the Gippsland industry has been made by major forestry companies which suggests that the industry is now of even greater value to the region.

¹ *The Timber Industry in Gippsland: a socio economic assessment September 2005. Jointly funded by the Victorian Government and Gippsland Private Forestry Inc.*

Rainforest protection

The Cores and Links contains areas of Cool Temperate Rainforest (CTR). HVP does not harvest rainforest and in addition leaves a buffer of vegetation for CTR protection. Much of the rainforest has regenerated following past disturbances and fire regimes where little or no buffers were in place for its protection. To further enhance CTR, HVP has devoted significant time and effort to determine appropriate buffer widths in consultation with a range of parties. Most of the CTR is embedded within large areas of native vegetation, well away from plantations.

A Commonsense Outcome



The agreement that the Victorian Government has reached with HVP is an important and historic one.

It means that all native forests across HVP's estate in Gippsland's Strzelecki Ranges will be protected and it fulfils, and builds on, a 2006 election commitment

to return the 8000 ha Cores and Links' area to public ownership and, ultimately, protection as part of the reserve system.

Importantly, plantation areas adjacent to cool temperate rainforest in the Gunyah and Jack River sections of the Cores and Links will not be harvested. This will effectively place a protective 'barrier' alongside these significant rainforest habitats.

The agreement supersedes a non-legally binding Heads of Agreement signed between the State Government, HVP, Australian Paper, Trust for Nature and members of the local community. After 12 months of negotiations, HVP and the local community were unable to reach a mutually acceptable outcome.

Once it became clear that a final sign-off on the Heads of Agreement would not be reached, it was incumbent upon the Government to try and secure the greatest level of protection possible in the Strzelecki Ranges.

Had the Government walked away once the Heads of Agreement expired, the company would have been entitled to harvest the entire Cores and Links area and replant the plantation area, and no native forest would have been permanently protected.

The new agreement also protects an additional 15,000 hectares of native forest in the Strzelecki Ranges. This will be immediate and permanent protection and significantly increases the area managed for conservation in the region.

Hon Gavin Jennings

Minister for Environment and Climate Change

HVP - Managers of Plantations and Native Vegetation

The agreement follows many years of consultation with stakeholders including State and Local governments, conservation groups and our major customer, Australian Paper. In 2001, HVP Plantations voluntarily agreed to a moratorium on harvesting of plantations within the Cores and Links while a wide range of stakeholders discussed how best to manage



the competing needs of the Strzelecki plantations. As a result of those extensive discussions, a Heads of Agreement was signed by a number of interested parties in October 2006.

Unfortunately, over twelve months later, a final sign off on the Heads of Agreement could not be reached with all the stakeholders. And so the Victorian Government and HVP Plantations worked together to secure the outcome we have today.

We have demonstrated a long standing commitment to working with a range of community members and a track record of 'best practice' forest management that includes input from regulators and the wider community. We believe the agreement reached between HVP Plantations and the Victorian Government provides a healthy balance between conservation and industry needs.

Sound stewardship of our land is a cornerstone of our business. HVP Plantations was the first Australian forestry company to obtain Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification, a third party independently audited accreditation. We are also accredited under the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS). HVP Plantations is the only company in Australia to hold both accreditations. Our forest practices are independently audited by consultants and local regulatory authorities to ensure that high quality forest practices are achieved. Stewardship is an integral part of the role of all field staff supported by a number of fulltime staff devoted to stewardship and community interactions.

This agreement culminates many years of work and is an important part of our commitment to biodiversity preservation.

We are proud to have been a part of a process which will add over 20,000 hectares of protected area in the Strzelecki Ranges.

Linda Sewell

Chief Executive Officer
HVP Plantations

